

# *Oxford University Society of Change Ringers*

## **ANNUAL NEWSLETTER - JANUARY 2009**

### **New Officers**

This is a complete list of the Officers elected at the AGM:

President	John Camp
Senior Member	Dr. Stephen Cameron, Keble
General Secretary	Stuart Nelson
Master	Bob Wallis, St Edmund Hall
Treasurer	Kirsty Monk, Hertford
Secretary	Stephen Dann, Lincoln
Librarian	Tim Hele, Exeter
Steeplekeepers	Simon Bond, Keble & Alex Dicks, Christ Church
Webmaster	Claire Bell, Christ Church
Brookes rep.	(vacant - no ringers this year)
CC rep.	Mark Bell

The Vice Presidents were again re-elected en bloc: Quentin Armitage, Doug Beaumont, David Brown, Ian W Davies, Peter Giles, Stephen Ivin, Paul Mounsey, Donald Niblett, Dermot Roaf, Betty Robbins, Andrew Stubbs and Lester Yeo.

Peter Giles has stepped down after 14 years as General Secretary –thanks to him for his excellent work for the Society.

### **Bell Restoration Fund**

BRF Trustees: Senior Member and Treasurer ex officio  
Andrew Stubbs  
Christopher Poole

Mark Shepherd and Alex Byrne have been re-elected as Independent Examiners.

### **Life Members**

The following have become Life Members:

Simon Bond	Keble 2005-2008
Hugh Wilkinson	St Johns 2005-2008
Claire Bell	Christ Church 2006-
Andrew Freer	St Johns 2003-2005
Robert Sworder	Magdalen 2005-2008

## **2009 Annual Dinner**

The 2009 OUSCR Annual Dinner will take place on Saturday 7th of February, at 7.00 for 7:30pm. It will once again be at Harris Manchester. The guest speaker will be Richard Grimmett, Master of the St Martin's Guild for the Diocese of Birmingham and Chairman of the National 12-bell Striking Competition organising committee. Nigel Herriott will propose the toast to the Guests, and Bob Wallis will reply for the Society. The Church Guest will be the Rev Canon Brian Mountford, vicar of SMV.

Tickets are now on sale for £50 to include champagne reception, wine and port. The menu is: Rustic Minestrone Soup served with Parmesan Cheese; Breast of Duck with an aromatic Sherry & Ginger Sauce or Swiss Cheese & Leek Pancake (vegetarian option); Classic Lemon Tart with Raspberry Sorbet; Cheese Board; and Coffee & Mints.

As usual, there will be pre-dinner drinking on the preceding Friday evening, ringing on Saturday and coffee on Sunday morning. To book your tickets, please send a cheque payable to "OUSCR Dinner Committee" to: Robert Wallis, St Edmund Hall, Oxford OX1 4AR, enclosing a SAE, details of any dietary requirements, and seating preferences. The closing date for tickets is 25th January.

## **Newsletter Account**

There remains enough in the funds for maybe two years' more letters. If you wish to contribute to its survival, please make your cheque payable to Stuart Nelson. If you can switch from a paper copy to an electronic copy, please do so (e-mail ousgensec@hotmail.com).

## **Meeting Dates in 2009**

The Society's business meetings are held on Mondays, and customarily take place in Exeter College. Please confirm the venue in advance.

TGM dates - the first Monday in term: Jan 19th, April 27th and Oct 12th.

AGM date – the last Monday in Michaelmas term: Nov 30th

## **Society Ties**

We still have just three remaining ties. The price is being held at £3.00 each despite a year of high inflation. The discerning dresser may purchase one from the General Secretary.

## **The Annual Tour**

Monday 13th April - Thursday 16th April 2009.

Ollie Lomax is organising this year's Tour, based in the delightful seaside resort of Weston-super-Mare.

At this stage few towers have been confirmed, but the plan is:

Easter Monday 13 April - to be spent in Bristol

Tuesday 14 April - out to Wells Cathedral (confirmed) and back via Cheddar

Wednesday 15 April - a selection of towers to the northeast of Weston

Thursday 16 April - south of Weston towards Burnham-on-Sea

As most of the towers will be in Somerset OUS members should prepare themselves for a feast of marvellous heavy eights and sixes.

Details will shortly be found and will be regularly updated on the OUS website.

Accommodation will follow the usual pattern, with a Church Hall floor for the residents and hotel accommodation booked for the non-residents from Easter Sunday onwards.

Non-residents who haven't attended for a few years are particularly encouraged to come along this year and see what you have been sadly missing.

## **The Society's History**

Copies are available for £30 each (including postage and packing), made out to 'OUSCR History', from the general secretary.

## **Address List**

The General Secretary maintains the Society's address list, of nearly 330 members. Over half are now on email. If you would like a copy of the list, either electronically or on paper, please ask.

Email addresses are held on the website and by the secretary, but the master list is maintained by John Camp for use on the bulletin board.

23 members are currently lost. If you can help us trace any of the following, we would be grateful:

Catherine Bannister, Robert Bruce, Rosemary Clark, Paul Crane, Lindy Ellis, Peter Gray, Andre Gren, Sally Hawksworth, Douglas Hird, Anne Lambert, Andrew J Loveland, Jeremy McCabe, James Milford, Melanie Milan, JD Mozley, David Newman, Simon Plackett, Nigel Sheppard, Richard Tapper, C Turnbull, AJ Vincent, Jonathan Wilson and Richard Wilson.

We now face the annoying position of members going onto email then changing their email addresses without telling us. Please don't be one of them!

## **The OUS Online**

The OUS now has not only a website <http://users.ox.ac.uk/~ouscr> but an online peals database <http://www.ouscr.org.uk/peals/>, a non-residents area ('Badger's World') <http://myweb.tiscali.co.uk/ousgensec/> and a bulletin board. Please join this by contacting [ouscr-admin@bellringers.net](mailto:ouscr-admin@bellringers.net) and help the Society by cutting down the number of paper newsletters.

Badger's World holds all the content of the Newsletters since 1994, and lists of Masters, dinners, tours etc. If you have anything you would like to be added, or ideas for extra sections, please let me know.

## **St Cross**

St Cross has sadly now been made redundant. Balliol plans to convert the building to a 'Historic Collections Centre' for its archives. The building will apparently remain consecrated and it is hoped that occasional services will still be held there. However, it seems pretty certain that there will be no more ringing. David Lane, Hon. Secretary of the Oxford Society, made enquiries of the college and they wrote back to say that the shelving requirements and the need for an inside porch (which would encroach on the ringing area) and restricted access for greater security will all combine to make ringing impossible. Removal of the bells remains a possibility.

The last ringing was on Sunday 12 October, attended by many members. The final peal was rung on 5 October by the Oxford Society.

## **600 Peals at St Thomas, Oxford** *(from the RW, 26 Sept 2008)*

4 August, 2008 saw the 600<sup>th</sup> peal at St Thomas the Martyr, Oxford. Not in itself the most obvious milestone for an article in the RW, but it means we have just passed the 500<sup>th</sup> on the new bells, and done so in just fifteen years.

The old bells were a rough old six with a tenor of 7.5 cwt, made up in 1706. In the 1870s it was the main tower of the OUS, who returned in 1944 and have rung there ever since. James W Washbrook was born nearby in 1864, and a Bell News sketch of March 23<sup>rd</sup> 1889 tells how many a time he and his friend John Jagger 'surreptitiously took the keys from behind the clerk's door and spent the whole of the afternoon pulling the bells with the clappers lashed, playing the truant from school'. It was Washbrook who rang the first peal in the tower on 31 December 1889. There were no more peals until 1945, then another 97 on the old six until 1993.

Problems with rotten timbers in 1991 resulted in Stephen Ivin leading a complete rehang, incorporating a concrete ring-beam and an extension of the old frame (which was made meccano-style of slatted wrought iron by Whites in 1904) from six to ten pits. Roger Abbott's offer of a treble for the ten led in 1993 to a straight jump from six to ten by adding a tenor and three trebles. The remaining heritage was negotiated in 1996. The hanging has all been done by Stephen himself. As a completely Taylor ten with a tenor of 11-2-6 in G, they have proved themselves not only exceptionally convenient but of such outstanding quality that they are universally regarded as a perfect peal tower: 'magic', 'delightful' and 'a peal paradise' are some of the expressions that have been heard. With hanging that makes a two cwt treble handle effortlessly, acoustics meticulously balanced and tower harmonics which give the classic Taylor sound subtly modified with the delicate nuances of a harp, who can disagree? As Stephen once remarked, 'no more of this 35 cwt nonsense. These are a rest home for geriatrics.'

St Thos are of course much more than just a peal factory. They are a first rate facility for the OUS (as are their other Taylor ten!), enable them to ring on a ten without undergoing the trauma of New College, and give them a second, advanced, practice night. Even in years without a resident peal band, they can still go for eight- or ten-bell attempts in term time now that non-resident members can be offered such a lure. The pattern is alternating practices and peals, with a rather large number of quarters thrown in.

Of the first 600 peals, the OS has 258 and the OUS 129. The STS also has 65 at the 'mother church', and the ODG 55. There have been 359 ten-bell peals, and 140 on eight. The 101 six-bell peals include three on the new bells. It can be no surprise to readers of the RW that the top method is London (3) S Royal, with 85. Perhaps more surprisingly St Thos is now the leading LSR tower. Then come 55 Stedman caters, 39 Yorkshire royal and 38 Bristol royal. The top major method is... London (32). Fond memories of the time we met short for royal, and the elliptical conversation: 'I wonder what we can ring instead?' 'That would be nice'. 'Go.' No mention of the method at all until the pub. The tower has also been used for record lengths: 15,016 67-spliced surprise major on June 15th, 2002 and 23,320 London (3) surprise royal on Jan 20<sup>th</sup> 2007.

And the grateful participants? 726 in all, led by Clive Holloway on 248, then Stephen Ivin on 192, Peter Giles 181, Charlotte Everett 176, Bernard Stone 163, Keith Anderson 116, Robin Hall 110, Andrew Stubbs 109, Claire Roulstone 106 and Brian

Bladon 105. Another 16 have rung over 50 each. 27 have now circled the tower: Peter Giles (7), Robin Hall and Tim Pett (4), Chris Poole, Nigel Bailey and Peter Border (3), Stephen Ivin and 6 others (2), and 14 ringers once each.

Every 28 February a peal is attempted in Commemoration of the Benefactors. Only one of the fifteen has been lost, in 1999. St Thos is already 27<sup>th</sup> in the all-time towers list. May it keep climbing.

The next milestone? St Thos and Mary Mag. between them are now on 989, so we look forward to the combined 1000 by the end of the year.

## **Residents' Review**

*Luke Camden, the immediate past Master, writes:*

The Society's ringing in Oxford continued as usual this year. Practices every Tuesdays at Mary Mag continue to be well-attended as does service ringing on a Sunday (at Mary Mag., St Thos, St Ebbe's, SMV and New College). Although luring fewer ringers, the practices at St Thos (focusing more at 10-bell ringing and Surprise Major) have been very productive and remain an asset to the termcard.

Those who were taught to ring by the Society during Michaelmas 2007 made great progress through 2008. Practices teaching call changes, plain hunt etc. were held at St Cross on Wednesday evenings during Hilary and Trinity terms. Sadly, these practices could not be continued at St Cross through into Michaelmas due to the closure of the church. The last service at St Cross was preceded by ringing, and I was delighted to see a good turnout amongst both resident and non-resident members. The Wednesday evening practices continue at St Thos, providing an opportunity to work on method ringing without the challenge of handling the St Cross Bells.

Our presence at the Freshers' Fair ensured we have a new batch of ringers.

Eight peals - including a non-resident peal of maximus at St Sepulchre - and 76 quarter peals were scored during the year. These include a large number of firsts: in method, as conductor, in hand, and others. The especially large number of quarter peals scored is due to a good deal of handbell ringing and continued use of St Cross through the Summer vacation. Many thanks to all those who supported peal ringing this year: help is always very much appreciated.

As for termly events, three 12-bell practices at Reading and one 10-bell practice at Abingdon were all well enough supported to be very productive, thanks to support from non-residents. Each term saw the traditional outing. The joint outing in Hilary was at St Alban's and was organised by the CUG. The summer outing in Trinity was around Chipping Norton. The freshers' outing (this year unfortunately attended by no actual freshers) was held around Woodstock. The outings were enjoyable and well attended:

our horde of ringers at St Alban's made the paltry CUG turnout look especially small this year.

Other events include the SUA striking competition into which the Society once again managed to enter two 6-bell teams and one 8-bell team (winning in both competitions), the annual tour around Sheffield and the annual dinner (attended by 99 this year).

Of course, none of the above would have been possible were it not for enthusiastic support from both residents and non-residents, so I would like to thank everyone who helped ensure the success of the society this year.

Luke Camden

*Congratulations to the residents on another SUA triumph – the OUS has now won the 8-bell competition for three years running and the 6-bell competition for the last two years.*

## **Members' News**

**Revd G.H. Paton** (Wadham 1941) writes: the 2008 newsletter was interesting reading (and not just for my bit, which I had forgotten writing). But, as adumbrated then, and now reinforced by preparations for a move suitable for my age and condition, I am very much curtailing my interests. Ringmer still flourishes. An unravelled rope about ten minutes from the end stopped what had been a good peal attempt.

**John Cawood** (Keble 1960-64) says: I have now retired from full time GP practice, but still do part time locum work. This has given me more time to travel, and I have made several trips to Australia to see my daughter and two grandsons living near Sydney. I have been a different route each time, and usually manage to stop off for a week or two in interesting places on the way back. Last time it was Hong Kong, Borneo, New Zealand, Tahiti and Beijing before that. A few years ago I was in Adelaide looking round the cricket ground when I heard the cathedral bells. I couldn't resist going up the tower and was made very welcome, especially when I told them I used to ring at Sherborne Abbey, the only eight heavier than theirs. I resolved to start ringing again, and now ring regularly at Sherborne. Alas, the tower has got higher, the steps steeper, and the bells heavier since I gave up ringing (again) through pressure of work in 1990, but I enjoy it and the company as much as ever. I doubt if I will ever ring a peal again, but should be able to manage an occasional quarter of Grandsire or Stedman.

The bellringers have also got me skiing again after an interval of 20 years, as we all had a trip to the French Alps in January this year. It was injury-free, and most enjoyable, even the 18 hour ride there, and back, with eight of us in a Land Rover. I also have a

daughter and another grandson living in Oxfordshire, and visiting them often takes me through the villages we used to visit on bicycles to ring on Saturday afternoons in summer in the early 60s. I still cycle a bit round here in Dorset, but is very hilly and the enormous 4x4s taking up the whole road make it much more hazardous than it was in those days.

Perhaps I will meet up with some OUS ringers soon.

**Alison Robinson** (nee Weatherall, Somerville 1971-74) says she always takes an interest in what is happening in the OUS via the newsletter, despite not being an active ringer at the moment. She hopes to ring again one of these days.

**John Lonsbrough** (Keble 1944-47) continues to have circulation trouble in his foot, but managed to make the ASCY dinner in his 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary year. He is uncertain whether he will make the OUS dinner but will play it by ear.

## **Obituaries**

**Shirley Rymer** (St Hugh's 1947-50) died on 30 November 2007. *from the RW of 4 April 2008:*

Shirley Rymer was born in Surrey in 1929 and had no contact with bellringing until she went up to Oxford in 1947. She attended an introductory session at New College and took up a new hobby. Almost from that day ringing became a major part of her very busy life. Her friend Ruth How, who is still ringing, was also up at Oxford, and started to ring at the same time. Their friendship was to last sixty years.

Once Shirley has mastered the initial stages of handling she joined the OUS and went on bicycle outings every Saturday in term. As she progressed she joined others to ring at four or five towers on a Sunday and also went to a number of weekday practices at Oxford towers. She was taught by OUS members, chiefly John Dickinson and David Gallop, who also introduced her to handbell ringing. Walter Judge of Oxford and George Fearn of Birmingham also helped her considerably in her early ringing years. Shirley's sharp intelligence and regular opportunities to ring with bands above her own level meant that she quickly advanced, and she rang her first peal in 1949 at Dorchester, Oxon. Altogether she rang 88 peals, including the firsts of Surprise Royal, Stedman Cinques and Spliced Surprise Major for the OUS, and two peals of Surprise Maximus. She was a member of the Cumberlands and the Salisbury DG, taking the role of education officer for the Guild for about ten years. Latterly she was a member of the Calne branch, serving as branch secretary and chairman.

In October 2007, her 60 years of ringing were commemorated in Avebury (where she had moved from Calne a few years earlier - PGG) by two quarter-peals. Shirley, unwell in hospital at the time, would have been cheered by news of these.

She travelled widely, spending time in India and Australia, so she came to have many friends in far-flung places. Two of her special memories were of ringing in a quarter peal at St David's Cathedral, Hobart for her goddaughter's wedding and for the Queen's coronation at St Martin in the Fields. She and her friend Ruth were invited to join a select band of Cumberlands, and after their ring were able to watch the procession from the church roof.

From the Indian experience came a great interest in the third world, which became an important part of her life. On a second trip to India, following retirement, she visited her sponsored boy in a Calcutta orphanage. The third world interest led to her work in organising One World Week in Calne. She was a great fund raiser, biscuits and fudge appearing on every possible occasion, for local causes, including the Avebury bell fund, as well as wider ones. She had many interests: walking – particularly long distance paths – the countryside, wildlife and cats, but above all she was a teacher to the core. It was her chosen profession, but she also taught countless numbers to ring, taking great pleasure in watching her pupils make progress, and using her knowledge of handbells to help in the teaching of method ringing.

She rang at Calne from 1964 until the early 90s, when health problems made her move the lighter bells of Avebury. Here she developed the local band, teaching basic bell handling to some and encouraging others to develop new skills in method ringing. It was a proud day for her when that band was capable of ringing a quarter-peal with the only help from outside being the conductor.

Shirley had remarkable determination, combined with a great enthusiasm for ringing. These two attributes alone made her a great force, but she also brought her personal qualities of kindness and expertise and a strong Christian faith, which supported her throughout her final battle with cancer. When she died on 30 November we lost a brave, selfless and unique lady and we will miss her enormously.

(News of Shirley's death was received from Ruth How, who learnt to ring with Shirley at Oxford. Ruth gave one of the tributes at Shirley's funeral, but she feels that the RW article is more suitable for the OUS because it gives many more ringing details. Shirley and Ruth had remained in close touch and had enjoyed holidays together almost every year, usually walking in the Scottish islands or from Ruth's cottage in North Wales.)

**W Stewart Gibson** (Brasenose) died on 3 January, 2008. *John Harrison writes in the Ringing World:*

William Stewart Gibson, the middle of three children, was born on 28th January 1933 in Wallasey. He was evacuated to Wales during the war, attended Wallasey Grammar

School, and gained a scholarship to Brasenose College, Oxford, where he gained a degree in Chemistry and a Doctorate in Metallurgy. He went on to work on testing metal for construction of Trawsfynydd Nuclear Power Station.

He had a lifelong interest in music, and as a boy regularly playing the organ for services at the Church of Christ in Wallasey. He was keen on outdoor activities, including hiking in Snowdonia, and motor biking round Europe. At a hostel where his friend was warden, he met Pearl (already a ringer) who was a temporary assistant warden, and they were soon engaged, and married at St Nicholas' North Stoneham.

They moved to Maidenhead, where Stewart learned to ring, and he never looked back. They had three children, and in the 1970s moved to Northumberland, where Stewart was a research metallurgist with Wilkinson Sword. They took up family camping, and also had their first dog, a Sheltie called Sheba. From then on Shelties played a large part in Stewart's home life.

In 1978, he became Quality Control Manager for Hydron, a contact lens manufacturer in Farnborough, and the family moved to Wokingham (which had two rings of bells) where they remained until after Stewart retired. In 1999, he and Pearl moved to the village of Fladbury in Worcestershire (also with bells). Stewart found a great community of friends there, and involved himself in all aspects of the Church, bell ringing, the local community, and Sheltie Agility Training. He was singing in a rehearsal for a concert when he collapsed. The above is a precis of his non-ringing life. Over 150 people, including many ringers, were at his memorial service in Fladbury, and heard the following tribute to him as a ringer.

I met Stewart when he moved to Wokingham in 1978 and joined the ringers at All Saints, but his ringing career began long before then. Shortly after gaining his Doctorate at Oxford, he met Pearl who was already a ringer, and he learned to ring at Boyne Hill, Maidenhead, taught by George Gibbs. He rapidly developed into a competent ringer, and rang his first quarter peal in summer 1961. His first peal was not long afterwards, possibly at Burnham, but no one is sure, because Stewart kept no records. He served as Tower Captain at Maidenhead for two years before moving to Northumberland.

At Morpeth there were bells in the Clock Tower, but there was no band of ringers. For a long time, the only regular use of the bells had been chiming for occasional civic events, and to sound the curfew. That was clearly far from ideal, so Stewart and Pearl set about establishing regular ringing, possibly the first change ringing band since the bells were installed in 1706.

Training a new band from scratch in an isolated tower is no easy task, but Stewart had a talent for teaching. One of his former pupils told me how grateful she was that he taught her to handle a bell so well, since it helped her to continue with her ringing when other things were difficult. Stewart was Tower Captain until he left in 1978. By that time Morpeth had rung 5 quarter peals and a peal, all rung to mark local civic or national events, and the band had come 2nd in the striking contest at Hexham in 1977. Stewart's persistence also led to the restoration of the town's handbells. The Borough Council had

'limitations upon expenditure', but Stewart didn't take No for an answer, and two years later, a suitably large cheque appeared, enabling the restored bells to ring 'The Old Hundredth' for the centenary that year of the Durham & Newcastle Association of Church Bellringers in Durham Cathedral.

Stewart arrived in Wokingham at a time of great change for the band at All Saints. Over a few short years, the arrival of many experienced ringers, and an upsurge in training new ringers, transformed the band. Stewart helped to mould the collective values and aspirations of what was in many ways, another new band. Over the next twenty two years, Stewart played a full and active part in the life of Wokingham ringing. He served as Tower Foreman in 1983, and again from 1993-94. He was also Deputy Foreman for a total of four years, and Secretary for a year. The only office he didn't hold was that of Steeple Keeper (which for the benefit of non-ringers is the person who maintains the bells and fittings).

At Wokingham, Stewart rang 215 quarter peals. Many of them were for services, and Stewart was one of the band's most regular and reliable service ringers. He rang 15 peals in Wokingham, out of a total probably between 20 and 30. He rang in the first peal of Wokingham Surprise Major, which was rung for the church's 800th anniversary in 1990, and his name thus appears on the only modern peal board in the tower. He was a regular member of the All Saints striking competition teams, and he appears in a picture on the tower website, taken after winning the Oxford Guild 8-bell contest at Bicester in 1986, at the height of the team's success. He contributed in many small ways too. For example, it was at his suggestion in 1981 that the ringers' annual ringing of carols around the town at Christmas was turned into an all year round tune ringing group, mainly consisting of enthusiastic youngsters. The group still exists, but its members are no longer youthful.

Stewart made a significant contribution to ringing outside his home tower. In Sonning Deanery he was in succession, Deputy Ringing Master, Vice Chairman, and Chairman. After that, he and Pearl represented the Deanery in the Oxford Diocesan Guild General Committee. He was an active member of the Open University Society of Change Ringers, serving on its committee for 8 years, editing its newsletter, and organising many ringing days. He rang three peals for them.

When Stewart and Pearl moved to Fladbury, Wokingham's loss was Worcestershire's gain. Stewart had retired from work, but obviously had no intention of retiring from ringing. He was a regular at District practices, and many of the quarter peals he rang included people ringing their first. His teaching instincts were not lost, and when standing behind learners he had the knack of getting just the right balance of compliment and constructive criticism. He served as peal Secretary of the Worcester & Districts Change Ringing Association from 2002 until his death. The role suited him – he was a stickler for detail, and could always be relied on to provide information when required. It is ironic that he modestly kept no personal ringing records.

I spoke to Stewart last summer, when I was collecting biographical details for a book on the history of ringing in Wokingham. Little did I realise that so soon I would be reusing the information that he gave me for this tribute.

Stewart left an imprint on ringing in many places, and many will ring in his memory. Last Sunday we rang a quarter peal at Wokingham. And as I speak, the bells at Morpeth have been ringing another quarter peal in Stewart's memory, which started at the same time as this service.

I've told you the facts of Stewart's ringing life as I know them, but bare facts can never adequately describe someone you have grown to know over many years. Stewart was a modest man. He didn't push himself forward, but he was always willing to give advice when needed, he was always willing to help when asked, and he played a full part in the life of the ringing communities of which he was part. He had a clear, rational approach to things, and a wry sense of humour. He was much liked by those who knew him, and who rang with him, and he will be warmly remembered by all his ringing friends.

**John Harvey Smart** (Pembroke 1953-56) died on 21 February, 2008. *Chris Mew writes (in the Ringing World on May 9, 2008):*

John Smart was a man of the Cotswolds, having lived most of his life close by. He was born in Naunton, Glos, on Dec 29th 1931, into a family with two elder sisters, Beryl and Peggy, and a younger brother William. He went to the village school and later to the Crypt School in Gloucester, and when he was fifteen learnt to ring at Westbury on Severn. National Service interrupted his academic studies and he spent two years in the RAF, where he was in the RAF Police.

John subsequently achieved a place at Pembroke College, Oxford, reading History. He rowed for the college, but more importantly met Peter Border, and his enthusiasm for ringing was fired. He took a post-graduate year teacher training, and started teaching at Longlevens school, Gloucester. Initially he taught history, but went on to specialise in English. It was there that he met Shirley Digby, a teacher of domestic science, and they were married at Gloucester in 1960. After a three year teaching appointment in Nechells, Birmingham, they made their first home in Alcester, where he became involved with crown bowls, hockey and competitive bridge. In 1967 they moved to Bidford on Avon, which was to be the family home for next forty years. He rang locally at Bidford and Evesham, but had a preference for the latter's beautiful twelve.

They had a son, Digby, followed by Amanda 2 years later. Although Digby did eventually learn to ring, neither he nor his sister followed John's hobby. In time the family grew: with Digby's two sons and Amanda's two sons and two daughters, John and Shirley had six grandchildren. John was proud of all of them,. Digby became a computer expert and Amanda a doctor.

John was well known in the Warks and Worcs areas, supporting a number of towers and

ringing a good number of peals and quarter-peals, many with Gerald Hemming's Saturday band, and post-retirement mid-week band. Unfortunately no personal records have been found, but it known that his peal total was at least 348 in a wide variety of methods, John being a capable and enthusiastic method learner.

His interests were not confined to ringing, as he had a great love of classical music. Breakfasts were characterised by Mozart and Beethoven in the background. He was natural at crosswords and quizzes – he was a member of the local team – and he loved paying bridge. He also enjoyed intellectual debates and would delight in winding people up, with a twinkle in his eye. He became head of English at Woodrush school, Hollywood, and retired in 1990, Shirley a year later. Although very much a home bird holiday-wise, he became converted to cruising.

It was great shock when he died peacefully in hospital on 21 February after a brain haemorrhage. His funeral was at Bidford on 29 February, followed by a committal at Redditch crematorium. A quarter-peal was rung immediately afterwards. We shall miss John as a good friend and 'character'.

**Bill Gibbons** (Keble 1938-40) died on 21 June 2008. *Mike Hodge writes in the RW:*

Bill sadly died aged 87 in hospital on 21 June 2008 after a short illness following operations for a replacement knee joint; the original operation being unsuccessfully carried out 6 weeks previously. His own health had deteriorated while nursing his beloved wife, Hazel who had died just over 3 months before him.

Bill was brought up in a pub, The Hare and Greyhound in Chesterfield. He went to Chesterfield Grammar School there and it was as a prefect patrolling the perimeter with the adjacent girls' school to prevent fraternisation, that he met his future wife who was doing the same thing but on the other side of the fence! Bill was awarded a place at Keble College Oxford to read physics. He completed a shortened degree course because of the war (in common with many other students of this era) to join up and was assigned to work on radar.

Bill was taught to ring by John E Spice (then master of the Oxford University Society) and Betty Spice, and about that time, first encountered F Hector Bennett as a ringer while attending a Toc H camp in Derbyshire. Formerly the local rep for the Brampton Brewery he was by this time head brewer and they went to local ringing meetings together on Hector's motorbike. By the time he moved to London in 1940, the ban on ringing was in force and he did not ring tower bells again until VE day when the Colonel at the radar school which at that time was based in the deconsecrated Petersham church, said to him "You're a bell ringer, Gibbons, get these bells rung!" Bill and a couple of lab technicians, armed with a pair of hammers each (there being no bell ropes) duly climbed the tower and "rang" the bells! Bill claims to have been deaf for a fortnight afterwards.

Bill and Hazel married in 1945 and after the war they moved to Stoke on Trent and he taught at N. Staffs Technical College for a while before moving to Somerset. It was at this point that Bill claims to have been the cause of the failure in a peal around 1950 after which he swore he'd never ring again but he reckoned without his son John.

Bill and Hazel's sons John and Chris were born in Staffordshire and Somerset respectively. While John was still little, he had been taken around Somerset with his Dad. They went ringing to stop John getting in his Mum's way as she had plenty on her plate dealing with his newly arrived brother, so John feels that bells were in the blood.

The Gibbons family moved to Sale in about 1952 when Bill got a job at Ferranti's. (While Bill sometimes told stories of his exploits there, it seemed you would have had to have been a fellow physicist to have understood his work in any depth.) There were no bells in the local church and thus it was not until the family moved to Goostrey about 1961 that John's interest was fired up. He recalled the camaraderie from Somerset and the welcome he and his father always got when they walked into the ringing chamber. So, one Sunday morning when John arrived a bit early for matins, he clambered up the tower to be greeted with the ubiquitous "Hello! Are you a ringer?" To this he answered "No but my father is". The next Sunday Bill was roped in! The tower was then run by Bernard Ongley, his wife, and his father, assisted by other local ringers (including Ron and Ruth Hough) who made up the six. For services and weddings it was always doubles and they used to call on the services of a farmer or herdsman who cycled from nearby Cranage in his overalls and wellies (complete with their own county aroma) to drum the tenor. John said that when his Dad arrived it was marvellous because only the Ongleys could ring by ropesight, the others all needing "the boards" to ring by numbers. Very soon the Ongleys moved away and left Bill as *de facto* band leader. Immediately there was a notice in the parish magazine and a flock of learners arrived (although some with an eye to the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme rather than a genuine commitment to ringing). That was the beginning of the current local band augmented by a number of "ready-made" ringers who moved into the village about this time, among them the late Ernie Jones, who gave Bill the much needed support he required to keep the ringing going. Ron and Ruth Hough became important members of the team quickly mastering the art of change ringing and passing their skills on to the up and coming youngsters.

There were some ups and downs during this period but momentum was maintained by Bill's energy and enthusiasm. He would take John and a car load of learners to ringing meetings and practice nights all over Cheshire, sometimes going as far as Stoke or Shrewsbury for a pull. Bill continued as Tower Captain until his retirement in 2004. (On a personal note, although I moved to Cranage in 1976, I did very little ringing while my children were little and it was not until about 1983 that I began to ring again more regularly when I joined the band at Goostrey. However, I was privileged to ring with Bill for over 20 years.)

Bill was a keen handbell ringer and when Hector Bennett died, Bill inherited his handbells and had them overhauled (by Codnors of Derbyshire). He began to peal them

regularly with Ken Lewis and others mainly ringers from the South Branch of the Chester Guild including some from Goostrey and Holmes Chapel and they meet on weekday evenings, often at Bill's house. The methods they rang were straightforward but the band enjoyed themselves and made steady progress (the pinnacle being Oxford TB Royal).

Bill was a great supporter of the Guild and the South Branch of which Goostrey is a member. Bill was Master of the Guild in 1983 and 1984 but unselfishly stood down after 2 years instead of the customary 3, in order that the next Master would have time to settle into the post and be very familiar with the workings of the Guild before the important centenary year of 1987. He also felt that a more prominent and well known peal ringer would be a more suitable Master for this period and Bill's wish was fulfilled because, as historians will recall, Rev Brian Harris was duly elected. Bill was also chairman of the S Branch for a period.

Bill rang a modest (by modern standards) 400 peals, the majority being in hand (including his first, PB major for the OUS); notable peals being the 100<sup>th</sup> tower bell peal (Cambridge Royal) at Crewe as well as tower bell peals of cinquies, maximus and surprise minor and major and in a "William" peal. However, that is not why we will remember him. It will be as a devoted husband and loving father, as a great supporter of St Luke's Church at Goostrey (he very much favoured the 1662 Prayer Book), as a lively companion, for entertaining us after handbell peals in the "ringing chamber" of his home in Holmes Chapel and for keeping the bells of Goostrey ringing for so long with his enthusiasm for teaching his skills to others. John and Chris Gibbons also have very fond memories of their father and, in particular, walking up Ben Nevis with him at the tender age of 74.

Two quarter peals (one half muffled) were rung by members of the local band on the Sunday preceding Bill's funeral (1 July). The bells were rung half muffled prior to the funeral. Other peals were rung in his memory).

I am indebted to John Gibbons for providing the notes which formed the basis of the heartfelt eulogy he gave at his father's funeral and to Ivor Nichols for further information. Our condolences go to John and Chris Gibbons and their families.

**Jean Darmon** (nee Southerst, Somerville 1943-46) died on 23 August 2008.

Robert Newton writes:

When Jean Southerst went up to Somerville College Oxford (from Leeds Girls' High School) it is very doubtful whether she had any inkling that she might become a bellringer. Neither would she have guessed that one of her contemporaries (a certain Margaret Roberts from Grantham) would one day be Prime Minister. The wartime ban had only recently been lifted in October 1943, but as the result of having a mutual

friend, she met Betty Robbins (nee Spice) and took up handbell ringing under the instruction of Betty's brother, John.

With her love of music, perfect pitch and a good sense of rhythm, she was an outstanding beginner, ringing 1-2 to a peal of Bob Major in February 1944 and a peal of Double Norwich after only four terms. By this time she had learned to handle a rope as well and her first peal on tower bells, also in October 1944, was Stedman Triples. Perhaps her most significant achievement during this period was a peal of 21 Spliced Major on handbells with Betty and John Spice and William Leese in January 1945. Jean was also a member of the band which rang the first peal of Glasgow S Major at the end of 1946.

Jean rang at Lincoln and also at Newark, where she worked as a teacher, from 1946 to 1948. She spent a year at Leeds (1948-9) to gain a teaching diploma from Leeds University. From 1949 to 1951 she lived and worked in Worcester, and rang in that area. When she returned to Leeds during that time, she also rang at St Michael's, Headingley (the church visible from the cricket ground). Jean was a Central Council representative for the Southwell DG from 1948 to 1951.

After Jean's marriage to Stan Darmon in 1951, they moved to Dublin. They returned to England in 1955, living in Northwood and ringing at Bushey. They moved briefly to Chester before settling in Amersham in the mid 1960's. They were key members of the Amersham band that set new standards (ringing Norwich S Minor) in ODG striking competitions and were greatly involved in the augmentation of Amersham to eight in the early 1980's. Along with her husband and Alan Ainsworth, Jean judged the Tewkesbury Shield on one occasion and the Twelve Bell Final at Reading in 1978. She rang several tower bell peals around this time, including 10 Spliced all the work S Maximus with the OUS at High Wycombe in 1982.

However, it was in handbell ringing that Jean contributed most to the ringing scene: over 80% of her 250 peals in the mid 1960's-90's were on handbells. She was extremely sound and reliable and could ring virtually any pair with apparent ease, achieving peals in up to 27 Spliced S Major, 14 Spliced S Royal, London S 14 and Bristol S 16. Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of her progress was that she tackled these demanding projects for the first time at a relatively mature age.

By the time Amersham bells were augmented again, Jean had virtually given up tower bell ringing, largely because of the arthritis which was eventually to have a crippling effect on her. She and Stan moved to Cheshire to be near their son about three years ago, and their practical connection with ringing ceased. Our enduring memory will be of her wonderful ability with a pair of handbells and her sense of fun.

Betty Spice writes:

I was very sorry to hear of Jean Darmon's death, and feel I must add a few thoughts to those of others who will have known her. Jean came up to Somerville when I did, in October 1943, to read Modern Languages. She was a friend of a new friend of mine, a

chemist called Barbara Smith, with whom she had been to school at Leeds Girls High. Jean was an outstanding beginner and rang her first handbell peal - Bob Major on 1-2 - on 11 February, 1944; other peals followed, and she rang a peal of Double Norwich in hand after only four terms. In the tower her progress was also rapid, and her first tower bell peal was of Stedman Triples, also in October '44. She very soon became a very valued member of the OUS, not only because she rarely made mistakes, had a natural rhythm which may have come from her love of music, but was also great fun to be with. With the OUS I suppose her, and our, greatest achievement was the handbell peal of 21 Spliced Major methods with my brother and conductor John, William Leese and me - which we actually rang before breakfast at home in Sittingbourne, on 2 January, 1945. She was in the first peal of Glasgow Surprise Major, rung for the Kent County Association at Frindsbury on 28 December, 1946. We tried repeatedly over the next few years while we were relatively in touch, to ring Cambridge Surprise and Stedman Triples in hand, but never rang either for more than an hour. After Jean's marriage to Stan Darmon and after a year or so in Ireland she came to live in Amersham, and there she was able to carry on and ring many peals of Surprise in hand with the Newtons and others of High Wycombe. Jean and Stan had three children, and it was after the sad death of her younger (I think) son that they both disappeared from the ringing scene. I am very glad that I obtained her Timperly address within this last year and we communicated again.

**Jenny Orchard** (nee Unsworth, St Hugh's College 1967-1970) died on 26 October 2008.

Jenny had suffered from cancer for four years. Together with her husband Nigel Orchard she was a very active supporter of the Society for many years.

A full obituary will be included in next year's Newsletter.